

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION 977
By Vaughn

A RESOLUTION to recognize and honor Tennessee CASA for its tireless work in advocating for abused and neglected children.

WHEREAS, it is fitting that the members of this General Assembly should pause to pay tribute to those organizations that, through an unflagging commitment to the best interests of children, have distinguished themselves as leaders in juvenile advocacy; and

WHEREAS, one such estimable organization is Tennessee CASA (Court Appointed Special Advocates); Tennessee CASA provides training and technical assistance to existing CASA programs, assists in the start-up of new CASA programs, and administers a small grant program for local agencies; and

WHEREAS, three children die from child abuse and neglect each day in the United States; in 2004, the Department of Children's Services reported 21,912 counts of neglect, 12,161 counts of physical abuse, and 4,727 counts of sexual abuse in Tennessee; on June 30, 2005, 10,020 children were in Tennessee state custody, and 9,646 of these children were placed in state custody due to abuse or neglect; and

WHEREAS, founded in 1977, CASA is a nationwide program of volunteers; each CASA volunteer is a trained citizen who is appointed by a judge to advocate for the best interest of an abused or neglected child in court; and

WHEREAS, a CASA volunteer provides the judge with carefully researched information about the child to help the court make a sound decision about that child's future; the CASA volunteer makes recommendations to the judge based on interviews with the child and all involved parties, as well as a review of all of the child's relevant records, and follows through until the child reaches a safe, permanent home; and

WHEREAS, CASA volunteers offer children trust and advocacy during complex legal proceedings; they explain the events taking place to the child, the reasons they are in court, and the roles of the judge, lawyers, and social workers; CASA volunteers also encourage the child to express her or his own opinion and hopes, while remaining objective observers; and

WHEREAS, children who are victims of abuse and neglect and who have become wards of the court are assigned a CASA volunteer; a child who has been assigned a CASA volunteer spends less time in court and less time within the foster care system than one who does not have CASA representation and finds a safe, permanent home more quickly; and

WHEREAS, CASA has been recognized by the United States Department of Justice as a model juvenile delinquency program; when CASA's involvement in a child's case prevents later juvenile delinquency and subsequent placement in State custody, the investment in CASA representation for that one child will have paid off forty times over; and

WHEREAS, during fiscal year 2005, Tennessee's 840 CASA volunteers served more than 3,734 abused and neglected children, providing an estimated 73,916 hours of service at an approximate value of \$1,297,226; and

WHEREAS, sixteen CASA programs exist in Tennessee to serve twenty-seven counties, leaving sixty-eight counties currently without a program; and

WHEREAS, Tennessee CASA supports the Pew Commission's recommendation that CASA programs should be expanded to serve more children in our communities; Tennessee CASA Association's goal is to provide an advocate for all the abused and neglected children in the state who need one; and

WHEREAS, relentless in its pursuit to provide advocacy for abused and neglected children, CASA's mission is to expedite the movement of children from foster care into safe, permanent, and nurturing homes, and to help prevent future juvenile delinquency by speaking up for a child's best interest; and

WHEREAS, Tennessee CASA volunteers are extremely giving citizens who are compelled to reach out with compassion to those whom life has treated unkindly; giving freely of their time and talent, these women and men epitomize the ideal of the consummate professional, dedicated public servant, and reliable friend and neighbor; and

WHEREAS, Tennessee CASA has distinguished itself as a public-spirited association of the highest order and as an exceptional asset to the community and the good people of the State of Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, the dedication demonstrated by all the fine individuals affiliated with Tennessee CASA is clearly deserving of the respect, admiration, and commendation of this General Assembly; Tennessee CASA is wholly committed to the noble precepts of public service that have earned Tennessee recognition as the "Volunteer State," and it should be specially recognized; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES OF THE ONE HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE SENATE CONCURRING, that we hereby honor and recognize the volunteers and staff of Tennessee CASA for their commitment to advocacy for abused and neglected children, commend their honorable and astute service to the State of Tennessee, and salute their unswerving commitment to living the examined life with courage and conviction, and we wish this estimable organization every success in all future endeavors.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an appropriate copy of this resolution be prepared for presentation with this final clause omitted from such copy.